

Baptism

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Bible Text: Acts 10:47-48

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As the Lord shall be pleased to help us I would ask you to turn with me to the Acts of the Apostle chapter 10 and the last two verses, the Acts of the Apostles chapter 10 verses 47 and 48.

Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.¹

This is an exceedingly important chapter in the Word of God for it speaks to us of the first entry of Gentiles into the Church of God. This transition which was to be made that the gospel might be declared throughout all the earth and that men and women of all nations, kindreds, tribes and tongues should be brought into the kingdom of God.

I read to you the whole chapter because it is a complete essay, as it were, upon a certain character, one named Cornelius. You will notice in the first verse of the chapter that he was of the Italian band. This would mean that he was a Roman, a Roman soldier of some authority and yet evidently one who worshipped the true and living God.

You know, whatever our birth or nation might be there are many signs and evidences in the earth that there is a God in heaven and although man is rebellious in all his works and ways yet what a mercy when God gives us a desire in our hearts to seek after him with that longing that we might find him.

You will notice that Cornelius was a devout man. His religion was not a sham. It was not light matter with him. It wasn't here or there or if he wished or wished not. No, his daily exercises were such that he continually sought after God that God would hear his prayer and answer his petition. God recognized the grace of God that was in him and therefore the time had come when this man of God should be gathered into the true gospel church.

This chapter sets before us the conditions for baptism. There are many churches where baptism is almost an automatic thing, that a person if they regularly attend or if they can

¹ Acts 10:47-48

decide for the Lord Jesus Christ, as they say, come and ask that they be baptized and no conditions are placed before them.

Well, this chapter shows us very clearly that there are conditions, that those who meet those conditions, whoever they might be, however far off by birth or by nature may be and shall be gathered in.

Our great question should ever be: Are we among the Lord's people? Is there any evidence in our lives that God has begun to deal with us?

Well, the Lord appeared unto Cornelius and told him to call for Peter. The Lord is pleased to use means. The Lord did not need, in a sense, Peter to convert this man. He didn't need him to come and preach the gospel to him. The Lord could have laid these things upon Cornelius' Spirit and done everything for him. But the Lord honors his own Word and he has said through the foolishness of preaching sinners shall be gathered in.²

And how the Lord works, as it were, at both ends. As the Lord was coming to Cornelius to speak to him, the Lord was preparing Peter to accept him.

You know, there was much prejudice among the Jews because they considered themselves only to be the Lord's people. And yet we learn in the Scriptures they are not all Jews that are born Jews. I guess they are naturally speaking, but not spiritually so. Only those who are adopted into the Lord's family are true spiritual Israel and it doesn't matter where they are born or what family into which they are born, there are no special privileges, as it were. But all those upon whom the Holy Spirit comes may be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So while Cornelius was waiting for the messengers to come to Peter he prepared himself and called his neighbors together. You see this man had faith. He believed that what the Lord had said he was able also to perform and that he knew the time when Peter would come even before the messengers arrived.

See how God works. Peter had come in from his labors and as the common practice was to go upon the roof top and there to await his supper and he fell into a trance. And in his dream or his vision he saw a sheet descending from heaven. And contained within that sheet was all manner of four footed beasts, creeping things, wild things, fowls of the air, a whole mixture of things. And the voice came to Peter, "Rise, Peter; kill, and eat."³

Well, Peter had been brought up to know what was clean and edible and what was unclean and forbidden to eat and therefore immediately he objects that he had never eaten anything common or unclean. But God spake to him, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common."⁴

² See 1 Corinthians 1:21

³ Acts 10:13

⁴ Acts 10:15

Well, Peter did not understand immediately the meaning of these things. And how we need the Lord to reveal his truths unto us, how dependent we are upon God the Holy Spirit to show us these things.

Let us not despise the day of small things. There may be but small beginnings with us, but the Lord will increase his work and bring it to fruition.

This sheet contained all manner of beasts. This is representative of the Church of God in this gospel age especially when from all corners and all types of people the Lord would gather in his elect, elect from every nation, the joy of all the earth, says the hymn writer, a peculiar people brought up in different ways, different backgrounds, different circumstances, some left to wallow in their sins, others preserved, for the most part, from sin. But all sinners, all needing salvation and therefore all together when the Lord brings them together with that purpose that he might deal with them in his love and in his mercy.

And as the three men came to the door Peter was given greater understanding of what the vision meant and he is asked to go with the men to the house of a Roman which by Jewish law was forbidden him, but he was under the law of God and how the law of God supersedes all earthly and manmade laws and therefore Peter was made willing to go and hear of the circumstances of this case.

And as Peter comes in Cornelius falls before him and worships him. And Peter immediately stands him upon his feet and declares that he himself is a sinful man just like Cornelius, but they are, in effect, upon the same ground.

Well, Cornelius opens up his case and tells Peter the reason why he called for him. What does Peter do? Well, we notice here that he begins to preach the gospel.

You see, the Word of the Lord will be fulfilled. It can never be despised or discounted or cast aside.

“Faith,” says the apostle Paul, “cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God.”⁵

This is the means that the Lord has chosen. People might despise coming to a church and hearing the preaching of the gospel, but they are despising what God has said, what his Word declares. And it is very solemn to go against Jehovah. Isn't this the pride of man that he thinks within himself that he knows best? And pride sets itself in opposition to the almighty.

What a precious gospel it was, the preacher, that Peter preached because he preached Jesus. And isn't this the sum and substance, the very essence of good gospel preaching? We have no other subject, we have no other name to declare but the name of Jesus, all that he is and all that he has done, how that he began from Galilee, how that he was anointed with the Holy Spirit, how he went about healing all that were oppressed of the devil for God was with him.

⁵ Romans 10:17

And Peter can say these things because he was a witness. He was there to see them first hand and he was able to declare what he had seen and what he had known of the person of Jesus and how that he came into suffering and death. He preached Christ and him crucified and risen again and declared that all that believe in him shall be saved.

“To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.”⁶

So he declares what the prophets have declared throughout the ages of time. This is no new or novel thing that he brings before them, but rather the old truths, those that have stood the test of time and will do till all eternity. These are the things that Peter declares and the Holy Spirit was with him to own and bless his labors. And the Holy Spirit came upon this household on those that were gathered with Cornelius and his family and friends and they began to speak in tongues.

In that dispensation, in that time when a transition was being made outward signs were given unto the disciples. Those signs have ceased many years ago. They are no longer necessary because we have the whole canon of Scripture complete, nothing to be added, nothing to be taken away.

For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord.⁷

Our subject this morning, then, is baptism and those who are rightly able to follow in these steps.

I want to turn back to the forerunner of the Lord Jesus Christ, John the Baptist. And we read that he was baptizing in Aenon all that came unto him upon confession of their sins. And when the Pharisees came John said unto them, “O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?”⁸

These are come just to spy. They had no interest in what John was preaching and they had no grace of repentance in their hearts to turn from their sins and to turn to God.

We see that the qualification, then, for baptism—and I would remind you again that the word “baptize” means to dip, plunge or immerse in. Some of the translations the word dip was the regular word and some have felt it is a pity that the Authorized King James Version translated the word “baptize.” But, of course, it would not have been thought then that people would pervert this word. And so in some of the original translations he is spoken of as John the dipper because this was what the very word meant, to immerse the

⁶ Acts 10:43

⁷ Acts 10:46-48

⁸ Matthew 3:7

whole body under the water. There for the remission of sins, that we might know our sins forgiven and have peace with God and heaven to come.

But we must come sincerely. We must come with that profound desire that we turn from our sins and turn unto God. A fake religion will never get us to heaven. God is not mocked. He knows the secret of every heart and he knows the sincerity of every soul.

Peter could determine the reality of the case of Cornelius. His whole life bore witness by its actions. All men knew that he was a sincere, upright, godly man. And God knew that Cornelius sought the remission, remission of his sins and therefore became a fit subject for baptism.

Now, of course, no Gentile had been received into the Church before and it needed special circumstances, in a sense, for it to happen. The prejudice of Peter needed to be taken away. The Holy Spirit needed to appear in the hearts of Cornelius and his friends. And although this is an exception incident, yet it lays down a foundation for all that are to be baptized.

These could only be baptized because they had received the Holy Ghost into their hearts and into their lives. In other words, here is true conversion.

You know, many people will say that they are converted and they can point you to a time when it took place and how they gave themselves to Jesus, but look at their lives, look at their witness, see whether they truly love the Lord or no. See if they are obedient to all his commands if they seek with godly sincerity to follow the Lord all the days of their lives. How many after a short season turn aside and follow after him no more.

How can we take this ordinance lightly? Because it is an ordinance which is strictly given by the Lord Jesus Christ. Man did not instigate this. He did not take it upon himself.

In the 28th chapter of the gospel of Matthew we read in verse 18, “And Jesus came and spake unto them,” that is, unto the disciples, “saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.”⁹ It had pleased the Father that in Jesus Christ should all fullness dwell. His is the ultimate essential authority. He is the head of the Church and the Savior of the body. He is ordained by the eternal three to take this role of divine authority among the people of God.

Now here is a commandment which is come from the lips of the Lord Jesus Christ unto his immediate followers, these who should carry the banner of the gospel throughout all the earth, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations.”¹⁰ And I want you to see the order in which the Holy Spirit has been pleased to inspire this Word. “Go ye into all nations teaching them.” Teaching has to come first. The teaching and preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

⁹ Matthew 28:18

¹⁰ Matthew 28:19

Again, “Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.”¹¹

How can we believe on him of whom we have not heard? And is not the eunuch a wonderful example in this that he was desirous to know the truth? As there are many upon this earth even today who would desire to know the truth, but he was missing one essential element to that truth. He did not know Jesus Christ. But when Philip came and preached unto him Jesus then the whole mystery was solved. Light flooded into his soul. Understanding came with knowledge. What Philip had taught him had sunk in very deep and made revelation of what was needed for salvation. And so the dear man could say, “Jesus Christ is my all and in all. This is the one that I desire because he is the one that gives salvation and only through him can that salvation come.”

And so he desired to be baptized.

And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest.”¹²

And what a wonderful declaration the man made. “I believe,”¹³ he says.

What did he believe? He believed that Jesus Christ was and is the Lord.

Now can we come here? Can we say with all our hearts that Jesus is the Lord? Can we see that great plan of salvation which was ordained before the world began to which all the elect will come to hear and know?

“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations.”¹⁴ And after they have been taught and understood and known the truth, believe it with all their hearts, repented of their sins, then baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. And in baptism by the eternal three upon knowledge, upon understanding, this is the order that God has given. And how dare man turn that order inside out.

And then you will notice in verse 20 teaching comes again. “Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.”¹⁵ So we do not stop learning. We come to a point where we understand the truth as it is in Jesus and see him as the only way of our salvation, acknowledge him to be the Lord, confess our sins and then we are baptized following the example that who has given us? That Christ himself has given us.

And I want to emphasize this. It is not man’s institution. It is God’s. And it is clearly written in the Scriptures that man upon repentance of sin and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is to be baptized in the same way as Jesus himself was. You remember that the

¹¹ Romans 10:17

¹² Acts 8:37

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Matthew 28:18

¹⁵ Matthew 28:20

Lord Jesus came to John to be baptized of him and John objected. But Christ said, “Suffer it to be so now.”¹⁶ He had to make this public testimony. He had to give a pattern for his saints to follow. It was necessary that the Lord Jesus Christ should be baptized. And so John plunged the Lord Jesus Christ under the waters. And as he came up out of the waters the Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, came upon him and the heavens spake, the voice of almighty God from on high, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”¹⁷

There is the trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit all engaged in that act which the saints of God are to follow throughout all the ages of time, to be baptized in the name of the holy trinity and then to observe all the commandments of God.

Here is the reality of a true profession of faith, a desire to obey the Lord Jesus Christ in all his works and ways.

And then we have the disputed words of Mark’s gospel. You know, some have said that these words should not be found in the Word of God. Man is ever wanting to take away or add to the Word of God. Think of those words of an ungodly man who said, “What I have written, I have written.”¹⁸

What God has written, he has written and man will never be able to overturn it.

Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.¹⁹

Here is the universal counsel of the Lord Jesus that the disciples of Christ are to go into the world and preach the gospel indiscriminately to all creatures because we do not know who the elect of God are. God only knows. But as we preach to all creatures we know that only the elect will hear the voice of God. Those who are not God’s people, who are ordained to eternal damnation will ever reject the gospel, finding no interest or desire for the truth of God’s Word.

And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.²⁰

So in the early Church these signs followed the preaching of the gospel and the apostles were mightily used of God to the pulling down of Satan’s strongholds.

¹⁶ Matthew 3:15

¹⁷ Matthew 3:17

¹⁸ John 19:22

¹⁹ Mark 16:15-16

²⁰ Mark 16:17-18

“Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?”²¹

I want you to understand that in every example given in the New Testament and especially in the Acts of the apostles that it was in this order that God was pleased to work. If we take the case of the Philippian jailer here Paul and Barnabas are in prison and God performs a miracle and the jailer is about to commit suicide, to take his own life. And Paul speaks to him, “Do thyself no harm: for we are all here.”²²

And the jailer comes springing in with his hat and falls down before the apostle and wants to know how that he might be saved. The Holy Spirit through that miracle that had been performed worked in the heart of that man. And what is the response?

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.”²³

But how is it performed? How is it worked out? It is not something that is done automatically. No, the Philippian jailer, he takes Paul and he cleanses his wounds and Paul in the midst of the night preaches unto that assembled company the gospel of Jesus Christ. And because the Holy Ghost is in it they hear, they receive, they believe and they desire to follow the Lord.

Now this man who a few hours ago was a hardened Atheist who disbelieved in Christ and had an anger against his holy apostles had become a [?] man and the Spirit of God alone could do this. No outward circumstances. And Paul preached, he preached a wonderful gospel to which now the Philippian jailer and his household were all ears to hear. At one time he would not have wanted these things. He would have been opposed to these very truths. But now the Spirit has so stirred up in his mind his lost condition, his hopeless state by nature that he was ready to receive the gospel of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. And as the apostle preached these things the Spirit touched him and the apostle baptized him.

“Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized?”²⁴

I have many cases in the Word of God. Lydia, again, earlier in that same chapter under the preaching of the gospel as Paul came and spake to that company what happened? The Lord opened her heart. And what is that? What is the opening of the heart, but to let the Holy Spirit in?

The apostle tells us that our bodies, that is the bodies of believers, are the temple of the Holy Spirit.²⁵ If we have not the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ then we are none of his.²⁶

²¹ Acts 10:47

²² Acts 16:28

²³ Acts 16:31

²⁴ Acts 10:47

²⁵ See 1 Corinthians 6:19

²⁶ See Romans 8:9

These are the terms and conditions that the Holy Spirit has laid down in the Word and are we to contradict them? Are we to say that the Holy Spirit has got it wrong that faith doesn't come by hearing that those that are non converted can be baptized that we may suffer this ordinance in some different or other way than the Spirit has revealed?

“And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord.”²⁷

This is not something that is an option if we will or will not. It is a commandment of the Lord Jesus Christ here spoken by the apostle Peter, a commandment to all those who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and truth.

Then the great question is: Do I love the Lord or no? Am I his or am I not? How are we to know?

Well, has the Holy Spirit come upon us? Do we have some evidence of a work of grace begun in our hearts? Are our opinions and our desires different now to what they once were? Have old things passed away and all things become new? Are we daily in our lives seeking for the Lord Jesus Christ?

We will ever be seeking all our days right until the moment of death we will be seeking after Jesus. Are we made sorry for our sins? Do we mourn over them? Do we look forward to that time in heaven when sin shall no more annoy? Are sins a grief to us? Do we bemoan our natural state and condition?

“And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord.”²⁸

Do we want to own and profess that name? What does the name of Jesus mean to us?

The hymn writer says, “How sweet the name of Jesus sounds in a believer’s ear.” Is it a sweet and precious name to Jesus? Can we say, “Oh, thou lovely, loving Savior, our desires are all toward thee”? Are we looking unto Jesus as the author and finisher of our faith knowing that we have nothing in and of ourselves, no grace, no ability, no religion? Have we been emptied of all our creature religion and come to nothing in ourselves?

Again, as the hymn writer says, “Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to the cross I cling.” You see, baptism as it connects with the Lord Jesus Christ means his sufferings. He said, “I have a baptism to be baptized with.”²⁹ And the more Jesus Christ was baptized in his own blood and baptism in the form that the Holy Spirit has revealed in the Scriptures is the saint entering into the watery grave, being buried with Christ in baptism and rising again to newness of life, a very precious ordinance and it is the gateway to the Lord’s table. Only those that have been obedient in following the Lord Jesus Christ in his first ordinance can follow him in the second ordinance. Believer’s baptism is a gateway, then,

²⁷ Acts 10:48

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Luke 12:50

to sitting at the Lord's table and enjoying communion with one another, but especially with the Lord, to remember his death till he come again.

Now where do we stand? What are our real desires at this time? Have we been moved by the Holy Spirit or are we still in a carnal condition? It is not something that is optional. Those that believe must follow what Christ has commanded. And this is why we insist that those that have been baptized should ever be present at the Lord's table because this is honoring unto him.

Let us never deny what Christ has done for us. Yes, we will have many doubts and fears. We will bemoan our low estate and condition. We will ever see ourselves as sinful creatures. But if Christ has done a work, let us not forsake that work, but let us thank God and obey him.

“If ye love me, keep my commandments.”³⁰

Isn't that the very root of it, our love to the Lord Jesus Christ? If we love him then these commandments are not grievous to us, but we will find them the most blessed things that we should rise up and follow him.

“Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.”³¹

How do we desire to follow Jesus? This is a great question that we have to ask ourselves. And if we come to the conclusion that we have not that interest and that desire to follow the Lord Jesus then how is it with us? And if it remains like this to the end of our lives then we know that we must go lost. Then should it be something that we should pursue, to seek after, to ask the Lord in prayer earnestly and anxiously, “Deliver my soul from death. Set me free and at liberty that I might follow the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord.³²

And notice the reaction. “Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.”³³

This wasn't a five minute wonder with them. Lydia, she entertained the apostles and Cornelius wishes to do the same. He wants to hear more of this precious Jesus. He wants to learn more of his ways. He wants to be an obedient disciple, to follow Jesus in all his ordinances and in all his commands. He wanted to be in their company and hear their speech and learn of them, to follow them in as much as they followed the Lord.

³⁰ John 14:15

³¹ Song of Solomon 2:10

³² Acts 10:47-48

³³ Acts 10:48

What a blessing to have godly company, to be able to speak and to share and to commune with the things of Jesus Christ.

May the Lord bless his Word to us. Amen.